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AUTHOR Jenner, Stephen M.
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects on group performance of both the promotion origin of new leaders (from within the group or brought in from the outside) and the reassignment of the former leader (either remaining with or leaving the group). Using the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) moon survival exercise, same-sex groups of five or six performed two similar tasks under the guidance of different leaders. At the completion, each subject completed a questionnaire evaluating group dynamics and leadership effectiveness. Prior to starting the second task, a new leader was assigned to direct the group, while the former leader either remained or left the group. Afterwards, subjects completed an identical questionnaire. The results indicated that the groups which had the new leader promoted from within performed better than the groups with a new leader brought in from outside. When the former leader remained with the group for the second task, the new leader was perceived as more people-oriented than when his predecessor was removed. Practical applications of these findings are discussed. (Author/TE)

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THE EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION AND PREDECESSOR REASSIGNMENT ON GROUP PERFORMANCE AND SATISFACTION

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STEPHEN M. JENNER

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The Effects of Leadership Succession and Predecessor Reassignment on Group Performance and Satisfaction

Stephen Mark Jenner, Texas A&M University

While effects of leadership succession have been examined, no empiracle study has examined the effects of the reassignment of the former leader (i.e., either remaining with or leaving the group) on the organization's performance. The present study looks at the effects of both the promotion origin of the new leader (i.e., promoted from within the group or brought in from the outside) and the reassignment of the former leader on group performance and satisfaction.

Same sex groups of five or six performed two similar tasks under the guidance of different leaders. At the completion of this task, a questionnaire was completed by each subject evaluating group dynamics and leadership effectiveness.

Prior to the start of the second task, a new leader was assigned to direct the group, while the former leader either remained or left the group. Subjects completed an identical questionnaire at the conclusion of this task.

Results indicated that groups which had the new leader promoted from within performed better than groups which had the new leader brought in from the outside.

Further, when the former leader remained with the group for the second task, the new leader was seen as being more people oriented than when his predecessor was removed. Practical applications of these findings are discussed.

The Effects of Leadership Succession and Predecessor Reassignment on Group Performance and Satisfaction

Stephen M. Jenner
Texas A&M University

Leadership succession in groups and organizations is a process that can create tension during and after its occurrence. Despite its importance to any organization, relatively little research has been focused on the succession process. Overall, research has concluded that the origin of the new leader (i.e., promoted from within the organization or brought in from the outside) has different effects on performance.

While the effects of succession have been examined, no empirical study has examined the effects of the reassignment of the former leader (i.e., either remaining with or leaving the group) on the organization's performance. The present study looks at the effects of both the promotion origin of the new leader and the reassignment of the former leader on group performance and satisfaction.

The first hypothesis predicted an interaction between the two independent variables, type of succession and predecessor reassignment. Specifically, external succession should increase group productivity only when the former leader was removed from the group. Thus, if the former leader remains with the group, group productivity will not increase, regardless of the origin of the new leader.

The second hypothesis states that when the former leader remains with the group on subsequent tasks, the new leader will be more People-oriented when directing the group on the task. Conversely, if the former leader is removed from the group, the new leader will adopt a more Task-oriented strategy.

METHOD

Experimental Task

The primary task used in this study was the NASA moon survival task. Subjects were given a list of fourteen items to rank in terms of their importance to group survival.

Procedure

Groups of five or six same-sex subjects were randomly seated around one table. The groups were told that they would be engaging in two decision-making tasks which would examine group processing. A bogus leadership determination questionnaire was given to each subject prior to the first task to supposedly determine the two best leaders in the group.

The experimenter gave each subject the NASA exercise form to be completed individually. When each subject completed his/her form, the experimenter randomly assigned a leader from the subjects (although the subjects believed that the choice of the leader was based on the results of the leadership determination questionnaire). Depending on the experimental condition, the assigned leader for the second task either remained or was removed from the group prior to the start of the first task. The first group leader's responsibility for the first task was to direct the group in ranking half of the NASA form items, pooling contributions from all group members. The leader directed the group in ranking the first through seventh most important items. These rankings were recorded on a separate form.

After this task was completed, each group member was asked to complete a questionnaire concerning the group's performance and the leader's effectiveness on the task. Completion of the questionnaire marked the end of the first half of the experiment.

At the start of the second half of the experiment the second leader was promoted (randomly assigned) to direct the group in ranking the eighth through the fourteenth most important items. Depending on the experimental condition, this new leader would either be promoted from within the group or brought in from the outside. Also, the former leader either "stepped-down" and remained or was removed from the group.

After the completion of the second task all subjects were asked to fill out a questionnaire identical to the one used after the first task. The questionnaires were collected, and the subjects were debriefed and given credit for participating in the experiment.

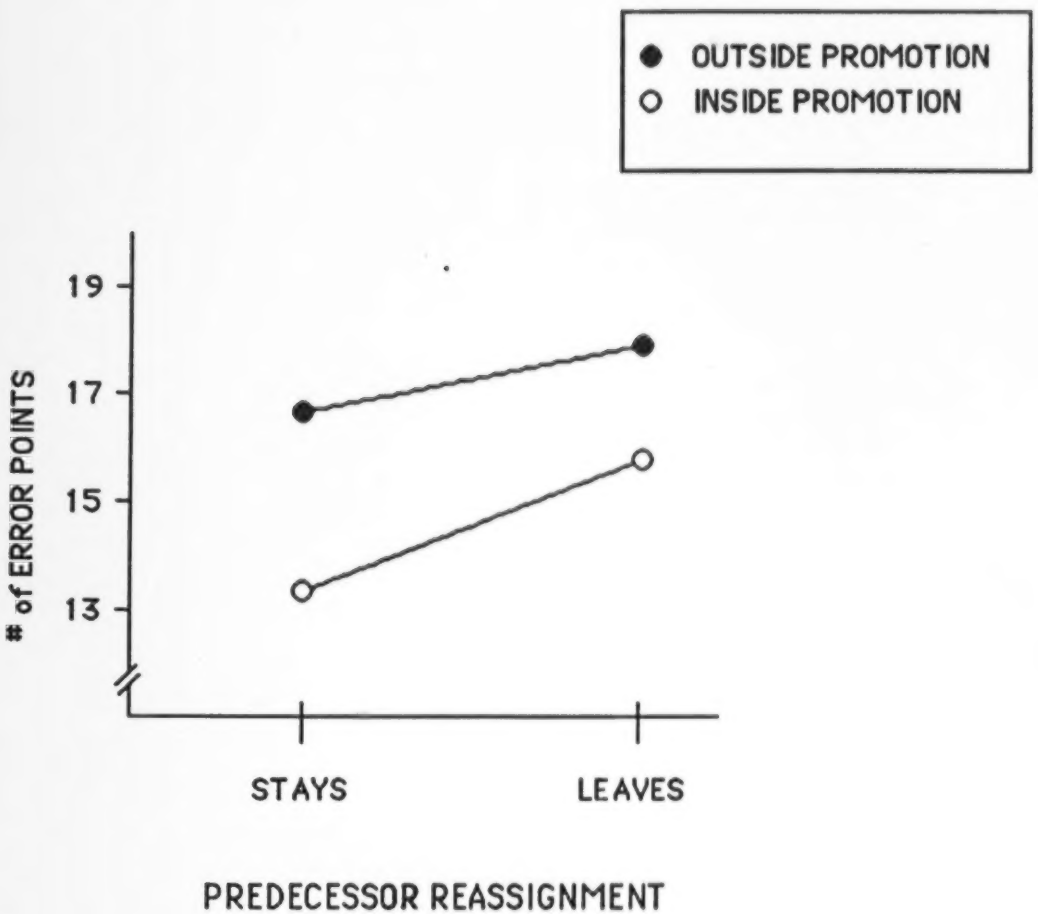
RESULTS

The primary goal of this study was to determine how various group conditions performed relative to one another on the NASA task, the main dependent measure. Also of interest was how the presence or absence of the former leader (predecessor) in the group would affect the leadership style of the new leader. In other words, did the origin of the new leader and/or the reassignment of the former leader have an effect on group or leader performance? Because the subjects interacted with each other, the group was used as the unit of analysis.

A 2 X 2 (Type of Succession X Predecessor reassignment) analysis of variance on the mean group performance on the second task was performed, yielding a non significant interaction ($F(1,32) = 2.05$, $p < .13$). In other words, this study did not show a relationship between the origin of the new leader and the reassignment of the former leader as having an effect on group performance. However, an analysis of main effects for promotion origin was significant ($F(1,32) = 4.10$, $p < .05$). Specifically, groups in which the new leader was promoted from within performed significantly better than those groups who had the new leader promoted from the outside (see figure 1).

Various items on the questionnaire assessed leadership style. One question asked the subjects to rate the leader on how "Task oriented" (1) or "People oriented" (7) he was. Analysis of main effects for reassignment approached significance ($F(1,32) = 3.65$, $p < .07$). The means for reassignment/stays was 4.71, and the mean for reassignment/leaves was 4.23 (see figure 2). Thus, when the former leader remained with the group, the new leader was seen as being more people oriented than when the former leader left the group.

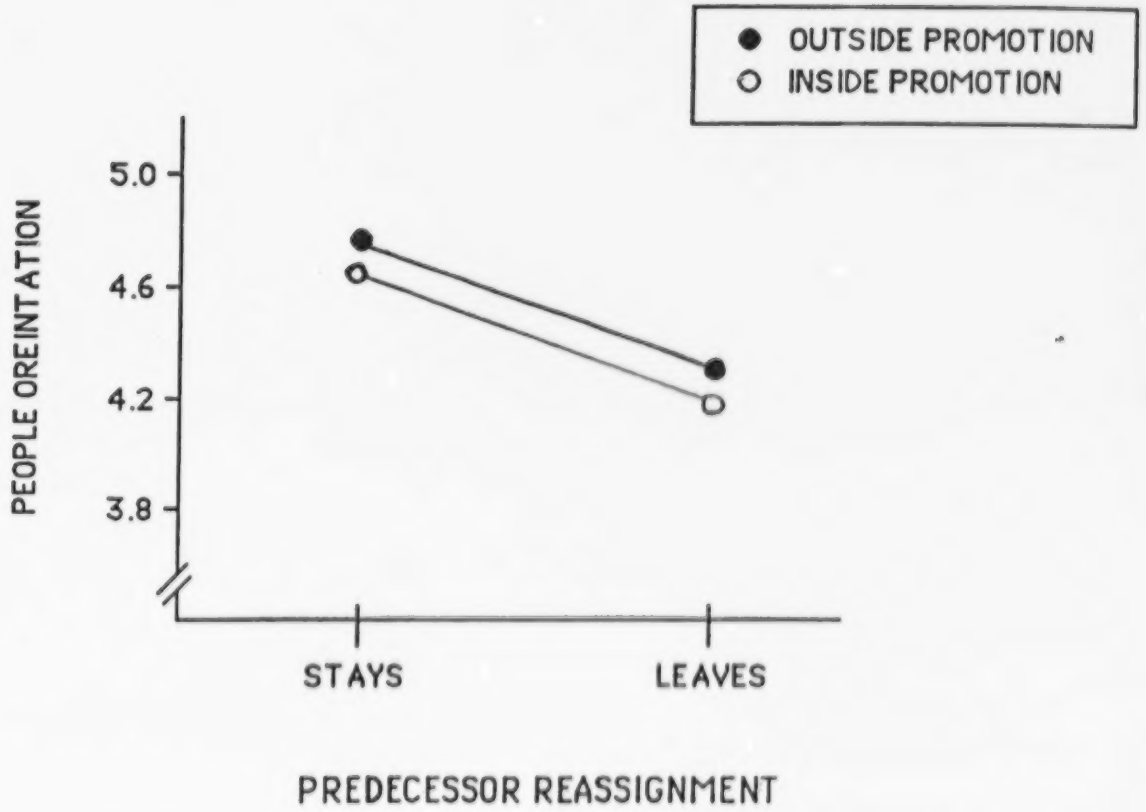
Figure 1
Means of Performance



Note. Higher means indicate poorer performance.

Figure 2

People Orientation of the Second Leader



Note. Higher values represent a more People oreinted leader.
Lower values represent a more Task oriented leader.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Contrary to the first hypothesis, it appears that the main factor influencing group performance was the origin of the newly promoted leader, and not the reassignment of the former leader. Specifically, groups experiencing inside succession, relative to those undergoing outside succession, performed better on the NASA task regardless of the reassignment of the former leader.

A subjective observation may also help to explain why groups with inside successors outperformed groups with outside successors. A common theme expressed by subjects after the completion of the experiment was an uncomfortable "invaded" feeling they experienced when the new leader was brought in from the outside. Some subjects reported that they were satisfied working with the group on the first task and would have been most content to continue working with the same group members on the second task. The external successor, then, was seen as an outsider who threatened the existing group structure and harmony. This occurrence may have translated into a disruption of group performance. Thus, in this setting, it appeared that the promotion of an outsider to lead the group may have been an even greater disruptive force than having the former leader remain with the group.

The presence of the former leader in the group also had an influence on the leadership strategy of his/her successor. When the predecessor remained with the group, the new leader was seen as being more People-oriented than when the former leader was removed. The results suggest that he successor, who has entered into a situation where he must lead an already cohesive group, may choose to focus on maintaining group cohesiveness by concentrating on member relations. On the other hand, groups which no longer have their first leader may be seen as one which has undergone change. Helmich (1974) found that rapid changes in organizations resulted in more task-oriented leadership behaviors, particularly in the early

stages of the successor's tenure. Therefore, the change in the group structure may have encouraged a more Task-oriented strategy from the successor.

One implication of this study may offer some insight as to what conditions an outside successor is most likely to initiate organizational changes. While a successor promoted from outside a group is more likely to make strategic changes, implementing these plans may be inhibited by the presence of his/her predecessor. Thus, based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that an organization who has hired an outsider with a mandate to make strategic changes remove the former manager from the immediate environment. That way, the new leader will not be stifled in his/her attempt to implement these new plans.

References

Helmich, D. L. (1974). Predecessor turnover and successor characteristics. Cornell Journal of Social Relations, 249-260.